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SUBJECT: BASRAH BADR CHIEF SAYS JAM BEHIND THE VIOLENCE; ASKS FOR
"STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP" WITH THE USG

REF: (A) BASRAH 47; (B) BASRAH 56; (C) BASRAH 58; (D) BAGHDAD 2115; (E) BAGHDAD 2182

BASRAH 00000059 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth E. Gross, Acting Regional Director, REO
Basrah, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S) Summary: The leader of Badr Organization in Basrah, Hassan al-Rashid, told the acting REO director that JAM is the chief culprit for violence and should be strongly dealt with by the new Basrah security chiefs. If the security apparatus and Coalition Forces vigorously confront JAM, al-Rashid said he was confident that it could be smashed within a month. He also proposed that the USG begin discussions to form a special relationship with Badr/ISCI. Al-Rashid said that this combination could achieve most of the goals of both parties if they work closely together. End Summary.

VIOLENCE IN BASRAH - THE CAUSE AND THE SOLUTION

12. (C) The acting regional director for REO Basrah on July 1 met with Hassan al-Rashid, a former contact and the leader of Badr Organization. Renewing their acquaintance after an eight-month absence from Basrah, the acting director asked al-Rashid about the deteriorated security situation. Al-Rashid laid the blame squarely on Ja'ish al-Mahdi (JAM). Emphasizing that "security affects everything," he alleged that 70 percent of the violence in Basrah is directly attributable to JAM. The remaining 30 percent is typical of problems faced by every large city. Al-Rashid said that given the fractured nature of JAM in Basrah, talks with putative JAM leadership would not be productive. He related that he had spoken to the former JAM leader Abu Qadir (see Ref A), and he told al-Rashid that there was no central command in JAM that could control cell leaders.

13. (C) Al-Rashid asserted that the weakness of the security apparatus leadership was responsible for not containing or eliminating JAM. The acting director asked about the new security officials assigned to Basrah (see Refs B and C), and al-Rashid replied that his early impressions of them are good and that they are saying the right things. Adopting a wait-and-see attitude, he suggested that time is needed to determine whether they follow up their words with concrete actions to improve security. If they work together and are supported by Coalition Forces, al-Rashid predicted that they could eliminate JAM in one month. Advocating a robust campaign

against JAM, al-Rashid compared the violence in Basrah to a bad toothache -- the short period of intense pain experienced when the tooth is pulled is necessary to remove the rotten tooth.

14. (C) Turning to the question of Basrah moving soon to control of its own security (the PIC process), al-Rashid opined that it would be ready to do so if the Basrah security forces united to destroy JAM and forged a close relationship with Coalition Forces. Noting that this still remained uncertain, he would not suggest a possible date for Basrah to move to PIC. But if PIC is successful, al-Rashid argued that a British withdrawal of its military forces should be gradual rather than abrupt.

"NEW" COALITION AND DESIRE FOR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

15. (S) Moving on to national issues, al-Rashid said that Badr, the Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq (ISCI), Dawa, the main Kurdish parties, and individuals from other political parties are forming a new coalition in the Council of Representatives. (See Ref. D.) Boasting that it will be very strong and will play an important role, al-Rashid urged that the United States support the coalition so that it could confront terrorists and others opposed to the Government of Iraq. If the coalition receives U.S. support, he said that it could achieve many of the goals of the United States and Iraq.

16. (S) Al-Rashid took the conversation a step further with a plea for instituting a closer relationship between the USG and Badr/ISCI. He said that a majority of the leadership in Badr/ISCI would like to develop a "major strategic relationship" with the United States. Because of Badr/ISCI's good relationship with Iran, al-Rashid said that the USG believes that it cannot have a close association with Badr/ISCI. Al-Rashid explained that the relationship with Iran was one of necessity - under the previous regime, Iran supported and

BASRAH 00000059 002.2 OF 002

harbored those fighting against Saddam. These ties to Iran do not mean that Badr/ISCI is beholden to Iran, al-Rashid asserted, and Badr/ISCI is not loyal to the USG. But Badr/ISCI is anxious to develop closer ties to the United States.

17. (S) Noting that Badr/ISCI enjoys good relations with both Iran and the United States, al-Rashid said that its main concern is the welfare of the Iraqi people. With its broad base of popular support and the tacit backing of the religious leaders, Badr/ISCI is well situated to work closely with the USG and would like to gain its trust as have the Kurds and some of the Sunnis.

18. (S) Al-Rashid said that he broached this with the acting director in his capacity as part of the top leadership in Badr and as an ISCI member. He said he had the approval of the central leadership in Baghdad ("they welcomed the idea") to raise the issue and that it had been put forth in Baghdad before and cited Vice-President Adil Mahdi as one who had done so. Al-Rashid suggested that a reply or discussion on this subject continue in Baghdad where more details could be provided. The acting director promised to pass his message on to Baghdad and Washington.

19. (S) Comment: Hassan al-Rashid is a good contact of the acting director, but in the past has been fairly circumspect in his conversations. His assertion that JAM had to be eliminated reflects both his long-standing concern over the security crisis in Basrah and the long-term effects it is having on Basrah citizens. He owns a house near the REO, but confided to the acting director that he had to abandon it because of the volume of IDF in the neighborhood. His house was hit twice by IDF, and his four-year-old son now asks when he hears a mortar or rocket, "is that JAM?" Al-Rashid said his family is in Iran visiting some of the shrines and that he plans to join them soon. With

the lack of security in Basrah, al-Rashid said that your house, car, and office become a prison, and he is looking forward to joining his family and not worrying about possible violence to them for a few days.

¶10. (S) Comment continued: Al-Rashid's entreaty for a strategic relationship or increase in trust between Badr/ISCI and the United States also was somewhat out of character for him. Discussions with him in the past have steered clear of any stronger association with the United States and were mostly factual in nature. Al-Rashid made it clear that the development of a stronger relationship with the United States is very important to Badr/ISCI, and is likely part of its end-game to situate itself in the driver's seat vis-`-vis OMS and Fadillah. Embassy has an ongoing strategic dialogue with ISCE leaders in Baghdad. During the most recent meeting (Ref E), ISCI leaders and Embassy representatives agreed to seek concrete ways to cooperate; Embassy will explore whether al-Rashid's proposal is feasible. End Comment.
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